

# COUNTRY LIVING



MAYOR COLEEN J. SENG  
[www.ci.lincoln.ne.us](http://www.ci.lincoln.ne.us)

## PLANNING DEPARTMENT NEWSLETTER

Three new studies on development in unincorporated Lancaster County have been completed -- two of them by consultants and the other in-house.

These studies are available on the Department's web page at [www.ci.lincoln.ne.us](http://www.ci.lincoln.ne.us). Copies are also available from the Department.

### 1 Build-through:

Consultants RDG and Schemmer Associates helped staff develop new standards and requirements for "acreage" (large lot) subdivisions proposed for the portions of unincorporated Lancaster County expected to be part of an expanded Lincoln in the future. The intent is to avoid many of the problems that the City of Lincoln encounters today when acreages are annexed:

- Land is cut up by the acreages, making it more difficult to lay out efficient urban density developments.
- Bringing public water and sewer through or around these areas to nearby vacant land is costly and disruptive.
- Maintaining the roads in these subdivisions, which do not meet City standards, can be difficult.
- Those annexed sometimes have complaints about surrounding development at higher densities, the high and unexpected costs for them to connect to public water and sewer lines, and their children's transfer into the Lincoln school district.

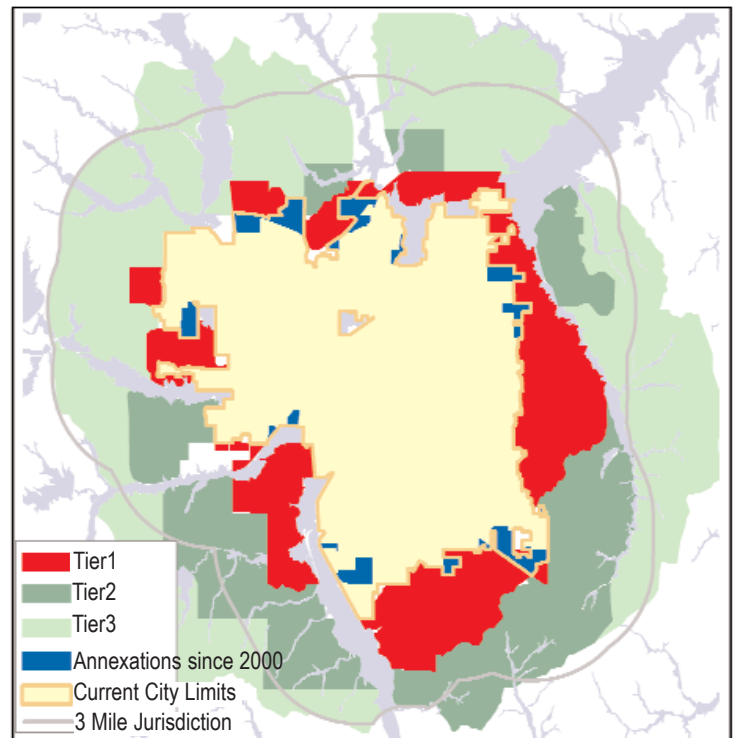
While unable to make all

these problems go away, the consultants have made a number of suggestions that, if adopted, should reduce the extent of these problems. These include:

- ☑ Requiring that no more than 20 to 25 percent of a parcel be developed with acreages, reserving the remainder of the land for future urban density development.
- ☑ Requiring that the subdivider lay out a conceptual plan for how streets and utilities and drainage will work on the overall parcel in the future. This would allow future acreages to better fit with the land that

surrounds them, and for reserving easements for future extension of services.

- ☑ Planning for the easier subdivision of acreage lots into smaller lots when City services eventually arrive, by limiting building areas and upgrading street requirements.
- ☑ Providing notice to buyers of acreage lots that they will have future financial responsibilities when annexed by Lincoln for upgrading their infrastructure by filing of deed restrictions and "no-protest" agreements.



## 2 Cost of rural services:

Duncan Associates has completed a review of the costs of local government services in unincorporated Lancaster County and the sources of revenue to pay for those services. The firm looked at the expenses and revenue sources for services provided by Lancaster County, the Waverly School District and the Southeast Fire District. One of the primary purposes of the study was to determine whether homeowners on "acreage" lots in the unincorporated areas of the county "pay their way". The question is whether they pay proportionately through taxes and fees for the governmental services that they receive, or whether these homeowners are "subsidized" either by other types of taxpayers in the unincorporated area or by taxpayers in Lincoln and the other municipalities of Lancaster County. The study has concluded that, except for very high-value homes, single-family properties on acreages in the unincorporated area do not

generate sufficient tax revenues to pay for the costs of various County services. Since this has been shown to be the case in many other communities, this conclusion should not come as a surprise. More surprising, the study also concluded that most commercial and industrial uses in the County also do not "pay their own way". Only agricultural uses on average generate more money in revenues than they require in County services. Since the bulk of the property tax base for Lancaster County is located in Lincoln and the other municipalities, taxpayers in these municipalities are subsidizing \$6.6 million per year of the cost of the services that benefit property owners in the unincorporated area. These conclusions suggest that new developments continue to be guided to Lincoln and the other municipalities, and that new development outside these areas be assessed a more substantial portion of the capital cost of road construction, e.g. by impact fees.

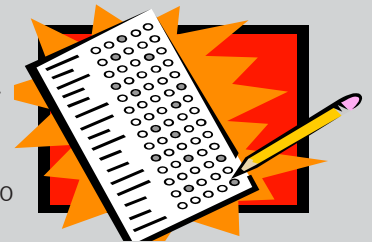
## 3 Performance scoring and development strategies:

The Planning Department has prepared a system by which land in the County is evaluated for its relative suitability for acreage development based on a variety of factors. This system is described in detail in the staff report.

Looking at all of these studies together, Planning staff is suggesting, for discussion purposes, some new policy directions for managing development in the unincorporated areas:

- ◆ More than 18,000 acres of land in the County is already zoned AGR, which permits subdivisions with three-acre lots, or as shown in the Comprehensive Plan to be appropriate for AGR zoning. Additional acreage lots are being supplied through the approval of numerous "cluster" developments on land that remains zoned AG, which permits one lot on each 16 to 20 acres. Therefore, there is little need to identify additional land for AGR zoning. A performance-based scoring system can be used to identify a limited number of additional parcels that are not yet zoned or shown for AGR zoning, but where the surrounding pattern of zoning and development makes AGR the only reasonable zoning classification.
- ◆ Tier 1, the area in which the City expects to expand within the next 25 years, is the most important area to reserve and not "clutter" with acreage developments. Planning staff suggests that interim development in this area be limited to homes on 20 acres or more, plus the continuation of the "farmstead exemption" which allows one lot to be "split out" from a farm property every five years.
- ◆ Development in Tiers 2 and 3 should be limited to the "build-through" model as recommended in the consultant study, plus the options available in Tier 1.
- ◆ Outside the City's growth tiers, the bonus provisions for cluster developments should be reevaluated. Staff suggests reserving the bonus to parcels that are located near a paved County road and are otherwise more suitable for acreages, or parcels in which the "outlot" is placed in a permanent conservation easement. The bonus system could also be structured to recognize the "natural resource" value of the easement – more credit should be given to preserving quality wetlands, native prairies, significant wooded areas and prime farmland. Finally, staff suggests a new option for landowners to "sell" the development rights to subdividers of land nearby, allowing the off-site land to be used just like an on-site outlot in calculating their permitted lot yield.

The consultants and staff are scheduled to brief both elected boards in September and October on these studies and proposed new policies. Staff will suggest that the boards direct the Planning Commission to hold a public hearing on the recommendations in late October. If you would like more information on the studies or the schedule of public meetings, please contact Mike DeKalb at 441-6370 or [mdekalb@ci.lincoln.ne.us](mailto:mdekalb@ci.lincoln.ne.us) or go to the Department's web page at [www.ci.lincoln.ne.us](http://www.ci.lincoln.ne.us). Your comments are welcome and will be forwarded to the boards for their information.



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